

February 22, 2022

Testimony before the CGA Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing on Proposed FY 23 Adjustments for Higher Ed Agencies
Submitted by Anna C. Cruz

Thank you, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representatives Dathan and Nolan, and members of the Appropriations Committee for the opportunity to address you today.

My name is Anna C. Cruz and I am a resident of Bridgeport, CT.

I work at Housatonic Community College as a Continuing Education Coordinator and I am writing to you to express that I strongly support that our community college system is adequately funded so that we can ensure we have the resources we need to properly serve our students and communities at large.

I also support the Board of Regents' request for additional funding for our community college system. We well know that increased funding is not only critically important, but necessary to ensure that, as educators, we can provide high-quality services to the students we serve, especially in an urban city, like Bridgeport, CT. I have seen services at our community college decline due to understaffing and insufficient resources. We have a great demand to support English as a Speaking Language (ESL) students. We have limited Information Technology and Spanish speaking personnel on our campus. They should be in place to support an influx of non-English speaking people that exist right in our communities entering our colleges.

This population of students live right here in our own communities and they have every right to have equal access to higher education and many start through our ESL programs. They are hard-working people, trying to make a living and supporting their families. They come from all over. Documented or non-documented is irrelevant. They exist because we exist. They share their incredible stories with me all the time and they want and need better. They desire to learn English and we cannot turn them away. They desire to be more productive and pursue a career through our system called Higher Education.

We need additional Spanish speaking staff on ground, in addition to IT personnel that understand them and can support them with the resources they need when entering our campuses. They are here to stay and we need to consider one thing: "They are not going away, unless we lock the doors and say you cannot come in." I highly doubt it.

Recently, at a Board of Regents Finance Meeting, the committee decided to propose a 5% tuition increase for students. Well, that is absurd! Many of our students are already struggling to cover outstanding balances, let alone balance their schoolwork, jobs and family demands. Any increases in our community college tuition will no doubt shift the burden of education for these students with the least resources, in addition to cause our school enrollment to plummet downward, not upward.

Currently, the BOR is threatening to layoff student-facing community college employees. This is pretty shameful, particularly when the Board of Regents and CSCU managers have hired dozens of managers over the last three years, such as Regional Presidents, Vice Presidents, Associate Vice Presidents –

estimating millions of dollars. These management positions are completely redundant, wasteful, and are nonetheless, draining resources away from our community college campuses.

There is no question that our public Higher Education system needs additional resources in order to fulfill our mission of providing pathways to the residents of CT, obtain life-changing knowledge and skills and reach gainful employment.

Thank you for your time, understanding and support of this effort.

Sincerely,

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